

Week 10: The Cure for Corinth's Darkness - 1 Cor 13:1-14:1

Pre-Work

- 1 Corinthians 13 is well known as the “all about love” chapter in the bible. But what is love? For the first generation of Christians, “agape” love was only understood by the character, wisdom, and acts of Jesus. Please watch this superb video explaining what the bible means by “love”.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

- Please read 1 Corinthians 13:1 to 14:1 in the translation of your choice. What would life look like if everyone you knew lived out this kind of love? What would *your* life look like if you lived out this kind of love, even if others did not?

Class Notes

Some of the serious problems in Corinth:

- The Corinthian Church considers itself “spiritual”
- The Corinthian Church has divided itself among followers of different teachers
- The Corinthian Church has placed social status and honor above mutual service
- The Corinthian Church has placed “rights and freedoms” above “mission and responsibilities” (including food they eat, who they sleep with, how they dress, and how they conduct civil relationships)
- The Corinthian Church members have classified the value of individuals by how spiritually gifted they are.

Virtually all these problems stem from failure to exhibit the single most important facet of the Christian faith: the way we love.

Agape - rare Greek word adopted by the early Christians and re-defined to mean the kind of love Jesus showed and expects us to show

Chapter 13

1 If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

- Paul personalizes this poem by using the first person; he uses himself as an example.
- The gift of tongues is not the identifying mark of whether or not these Corinthians are Spirit-filled. It’s wonderful, but without love it is like...
- The “clanging cymbals” of Corinth.

2 If I have *the gift of* prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

- Preaching, predicting, supernatural knowledge, and supreme faith...without love, “I am nothing”
- Paul has raised the stakes. Without love, not only is he a “clanging cymbal”, he is actually nothing at all.

3 And if I give away all my possessions *to charity*, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good.

- It is possible to give everything away for reasons other than love (civic patronage)
- Even self sacrifice (to boast on Judgment Day) is worthless if it is loveless

What, then, is agape love?

A - The patience of agape (patient and kind) - positive v4a

B - What agape is NOT (self seeking) - negative v4b-6

A` - The patience of agape (patiently endures) - positive v7

4 Love is patient (*delay wrath*), love is kind (*to soothe and heal wounds*),

- If loving patience and kindness rule, then all these situations the Corinthians struggle with will resolve.
 - The “who is a better teacher” issue
 - The “am I allowed to eat this food” issue
 - The “who cares if pagans are offended, I’ll marry my stepmom anyway” issue
 - The divorce issue
 - The “who is more spiritual” issue

it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant.

- Jealous/envious - (zeloi) - example of envy (Sunday church and then drive in the nice neighborhood)
- Brag - lifting oneself up - self-flattery
- Arrogant - putting others down to seem better by comparison

5 It does not act disgracefully,

- Rude - no concern for the feelings of others, ignoring social conventions because they are “stupid” - examples

it does not seek its own *benefit*;

- My agenda, my preferences, my team. “_____ don’t add value to my life.”

it is not provoked,

- Agape love is not “touchy”, but is able to absorb offense

does not keep an account of a wrong *suffered*,

- **Accounts demand recompense**; love clears the ledger.

6 it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

- Unrighteousness - “not doing right by God or others”; in other words, agape love does not revel in getting one over on someone or hearing bad news for one’s enemy
- Rejoices in the truth - when you find out reported gossip is not true, **THAT** causes love to rejoice

7 it keeps every confidence,

- “Stego” - it doesn’t leak - Keeping something in confidence even when it is to your disadvantage

The previous characteristics of love are primarily human-focused. These next three characteristics of love are God-focused.

it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- Love is a faithful life
- Love is rooted in “the ultimate hope” (see Ch 15)
- Love endures difficulty for the sake of a faithful life and expressing the ultimate hope

8 Love never fails;

- Or “falls”; meaning if it is real agape, it won’t give up under pressure or offense. For example, the cross.

but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away with; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away with.

- Eloquence in spiritual speech or even supernatural tongues are impermanent. Books, education, data...all will be discarded like childhood toys.

9 For we know in part and prophesy in part; **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with.

- The best of our incomplete knowledge and preaching/prophecy will be unnecessary when we are in the physical presence of Jesus in the New Jerusalem.
- “Perfect” - theories

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known.

- The child-to-adult metaphor means all these spiritual gifts the Corinthians are squabbling over won’t be needed in the Age to Come. We see partly and know partly; but then there will be none of this “this person has greater knowledge”. Levels of knowledge will be moot.

13 But now faith, hope, *and* love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Three eternal, lasting things even in the New Heavens and New Earth:
 - Faith/belief/steady faithfulness
 - The ultimate hope (fulfilled)
 - Love - which gives meaning to everything else

Chapter 14

1 Pursue love, yet earnestly desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

- Now that the Corinthians understand love (we can only hope), they can have a proper lens when it comes to seeking spiritual gifts
- Prophecy (preaching and communicating God’s heart and the gospel to others) is loving, so it should be especially desired. It is one of the “better way” gifts because it is an expression of love

“I can still hear the sound of thundering guns telling me that somewhere nearby people are dying. Ever since we left the village I feel as though something has been shattered

inside me. We have lost everything. Our house was burned. My books were torn to pieces. Our furniture was stolen. But what is more important is that the soft nights and the fresh mornings in the village are gone and with them I have lost my roots and have become “like grass blown by the wind,” as the Psalmist put it... It is the time of death. One night early in September our village was shelled and we fled. We hid in a cave near our small brook waiting for the mad night to subside. But the guns did not stop so we fled again through the valley until we reached Beirut. We thought we had escaped, but the dark night caught up with us in all its madness. Am I living through a nightmare? Has time really stood still ever since the big clock was broken on the wall of my grandfathers’ house in the village? One day someone came and told us that our house in the village (my grandfather’s house), was looted and burned. The young men burned it after emptying it together. My anguish grew into hatred. Hatred is strange for it takes many forms. For me it is like a boil. It took root within me and sowed the seeds of death in my heart. It grew and spread like a boil with nothing but pus inside. I woke up at the sound of the big guns and asked myself, “How can a young man stand behind a gun and fire all those rockets around us?” I thought of that young man and to me he acquired the face of that other “young man who looted and burned my grandfather’s house. Then in the midst of the sound of thundering guns, from the depths of my despair and pain, I finally understood. “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am but sounding brass like the empty shell cases of the big guns. Love alone can bear the burden of the living for it bears all things. It bears this young man who is standing behind the gun, and that other young man who burned my grandfather’s house. We carry our dead with us like open wounds. All of us have such wounds. Life is different. Life is the realm of love which overcomes death. I pray that the living Lord may reign in our lives, and not our dead.”—Hanna Haddad, age 14, Feb 2, 1984, during the Lebanese Civil War

Excerpt From

Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes

Kenneth E Bailey

Reflections